

Testimony of Karen A. Mello
In Support of Bill No. 158
Children's Committee, February 14, 2013

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Children's Committee, my name is Karen A. Mello, from Bethel, CT and I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I was sexually abused at the age of nine. The abuse and the lack of support had a significant impact on my life. I became a withdrawn and depressed teenager, then eventually a depressed adult. At one time, I could not work or care for my children and at my lowest point, even wanted to end my own life. Based on my life experiences, I would like to submit my testimony in support of Bill No. 158, An Act Establishing a Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children.

Childhood sexual abuse continues to be a silent epidemic in our society and the hard fact is that it does not discriminate: it can happen to any child, anywhere, at anytime and the statistics are alarming: **1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18 and 93% of the time the child's abuser is someone they know and trust.** It is estimated that **less than half of all sexual assaults on children are reported to the police.** In addition, when sexual abuse has occurred, the child may develop a variety of psychological issues as children are not mentally prepared to deal with this at an early age. Some of these issues may include depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, low self esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal tendencies. The effects of childhood sexual abuse can last a lifetime. I believe that we need to do more to take preventative action to stop and address childhood sexual abuse. Bill No. 158 would ensure that we are **educating all of our children** at an early age to recognize and escape from potential abusers.

Through Bill No. 158, a task force would review and adopt age appropriate curriculum for our most vulnerable population, our children. The fact is that children are scared into silence by their perpetrator and this curriculum would show children that they have a voice. Sadly, our society does not talk openly about this issue. But by training our educators to use this curriculum, we can ensure that our children will know they have an adult that they can go to for help. I truly believe that if I had this knowledge as a child, it would have made a big difference in my life. Instead of burying this secret, telling no one and suffering into my teen years and younger adult life, I would have found help and healing sooner.

Therefore, I urge the Children's Committee to support Bill No. 158 to help protect the children of Connecticut and generations to come.